

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN
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SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION GENEVA
USDEL MBFR VIENNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 05975

EXDIS

GENEVA FOR USDEL SALT

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (BROWN, HAROLD), PINR, (APEL, HANS), GW
SUBJECT: HANS APEL, THE NEW GERMAN DEFENSE MINISTER

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1. WHEN THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MEETS WITH HANS APEL
NEXT WEEK, HE WILL BE DEALING WITH A YOUNG, DYNAMIC,
PRAGMATIC, AND BRIGHT EMBODIMENT OF POSTWAR GERMANY.
APEL IS NOT AN IDEOLOGIST OR A THEORETICIAN. HIS
TRAINING CONSISTS OF A PHD IN ECONOMICS AND A BACKGROUND
OF TWENTY YEARS IN POLITICS, WITH CONCENTRATION ON

EUROPEAN AND FINANCIAL MATTERS. HE IS A FAST STUDY AND HAS ALREADY QUICKLY MADE A SERIES OF TOUGH DECISIONS ALTHOUGH HE HAS IN THE PAST GENERALLY HAD A REPUTATION AS A THOUGHTFUL MAN NOT PRONE TO RASH ACTION.

2. AT 46, APEL CAN ACT WITH THE SELF-ASSURANCE OF THE ANOINTED. ACCORDING TO SOME, HIS CAREER FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS ALREADY APPEARS TO BE CLEARLY LAID OUT. CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT'S REPORTED PREFERENCES ARE THE FOLLOWING: APEL IS TO REMAIN DEFENSE MINISTER FOR TWO YEARS; IN 1980, HE IS TO TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SPD PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FROM THE AGING HERBERT WEHNER; SOME YEARS AFTER THAT, DEPENDING IN PART ON WHO WINS THE 1980 ELECTION, APEL IS TO TAKE OVER THE CHANCELLORSHIP OR, AT LEAST, A VERY PROMINENT ROLE IN THE SPD.

3. APEL DID NOT WANT TO BE DEFENSE MINISTER. HE HAS MADE THIS CLEAR REPEATEDLY OVER THE YEARS, ALTHOUGH HE WAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED A CANDIDATE FOR THE POSITION. IN 1975, HE DECLARED PUBLICLY THAT HE WOULD REFUSE EVER TO HOLD THE PORTFOLIO BECAUSE HE FELT NO AFFINITY FOR THE MILITARY AND THEIR PROFESSION. HIS FATHER AND WHOLE FAMILY WERE PACIFIST IN ORIENTATION, ALTHOUGH APEL IS NOT A PACIFIST HIMSELF. HIS PERSONAL STYLE IS NOT ONE THAT GERMANS -- ESPECIALLY THE MILITARY -- CONFIDENTIAL

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USUALLY EXPECT IN THEIR DEFENSE MINISTER.

4. FOR APEL, THEREFORE, THE DEFENSE MINISTRY REPRESENTS AN ESSENTIAL DETOUR ON THE ROAD TO THE TOP. HE MUST DO IT WELL, BUT HE NEED NOT DO IT FOR VERY LONG. WHAT HE WILL WANT TO PROVE IS THAT A MAN LIKE HIMSELF, WITHOUT MILITARY TRAINING OR INCLINATION, CAN HANDLE THE MOST DIFFICULT CABINET POSITION FACING ANY SOCIAL DEMOCRAT. HIS FIRST PRIORITY WILL BE TO GET HIS OWN HOUSE IN ORDER, AVOIDING THE MANAGEMENT WEAKNESSES THAT HAVE PLAGUED MOST OF HIS PREDECESSORS AND THAT DROVE GEORG LEBER FROM OFFICE. HIS SECOND PRIORITY WILL BE TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT GERMANY -- AS A PART OF NATO -- MAINTAINS A STRONG AND VIABLE DEFENSE AT A COST THAT DOES NOT FURTHER BURDEN A BUDGET ALREADY UNCOMFORTABLY IN DEFICIT.

5. APEL IS NEITHER PRO-AMERICAN NOR ANTI-AMERICAN. HE HAS BEEN TO THE UNITED STATES MANY TIMES. HE WAS A LEADER GRANTEE IN 1970 AND HE FOLLOWED US AFFAIRS FOR SOME TIME IN THE BUNDESTAG. HE SPEAKS STRIKINGLY GOOD ENGLISH, HAVING ONCE EVEN TRAINED AS AN INTERPRETER.

HE HAS LONG MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH THE US EMBASSY, AT
VARIOUS LEVELS AS HIS OWN CAREER HAS PROGRESSED.

6. APEL DOES NOT, HOWEVER, HAVE THE EMOTIONAL AFFINITY
FOR THE UNITED STATES THAT LEBER HAD. HE WILL UN-
DOUBTEDLY WANT TO DEVELOP GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 05975

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THE SECRETARY, AND HE WILL ALWAYS WANT TO MAKE CERTAIN
THAT GERMAN AND AMERICAN DEFENSE PLANS REMAIN IN TUNE.
HOWEVER, UNLIKE LEBER, HE DID NOT HAVE THE CLOSE ASSO-

CIATION WITH AMERICANS IN THE POSTWAR STRUGGLE AGAINST COMMUNISM AND HE DOES NOT FEEL AS MUCH HESITATION AS LEBER DID ABOUT CHALLENGING AMERICAN STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCEPTS.

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7. APEL ALSO HAS A GREATER INTEREST THAN LEBER IN THE FULL SCOPE OF SECURITY ISSUES, INCLUDING NOT ONLY DEFENSE MATTERS BUT INTERNATIONAL DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS. HE IS EXPECTED TO TAKE A MORE LIVELY INTEREST THAN LEBER IN SALT AND MBFR MATTERS, ALTHOUGH AT THIS POINT NOBODY APPEARS SURE WHAT HIS SPECIFIC ATTITUDES WILL BE.

8. IN HIS DEALINGS WITH OTHERS, APEL CAN BE BOTH VERY DIRECT AND VERY FRIENDLY. YEARS AGO, WHEN HE WAS ON THE STAFF OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND WHEN HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR EUROPEAN ISSUES AS A STATE SECRETARY AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, APEL EARNED THE LABEL OF "LE BOCHE" FROM HIS FRENCH INTERLOCUTORS BECAUSE OF HIS BLUNT OUTSPOKENESS. HE HAS SINCE SOFTENED HIS STYLE SOMEWHAT, BUT HE IS STILL MUCH MORE DIRECT AND POINTED IN HIS COMMENTS THAN MINISTER LEBER HAD BEEN.

9. APEL FEELS COMFORTABLE IN AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. LIKE ANYBODY FROM HAMBURG, HE IS A BORN COSMOPOLITAN WITH A FEELING FOR GERMANY'S RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. HIS OWN EXPERIENCE IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND HIS FREQUENT WORLDWIDE CONTACTS AS A FINANCE MINISTER HAVE ADDED TO HIS CAPACITY TO DEAL ACROSS THE BOARD ON INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS.

10. APEL PREFERS IN HIS DISCUSSIONS TO GO RIGHT TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER. HE DOES NOT DWELL ON THEORETICAL ISSUES OR TOPICS, BUT HE WILL PROBABLY ASK FOR A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF US STRATEGIC CONCEPTS. ALTHOUGH, AS INDICATED ABOVE, HE HAS MADE SOME SWIFT DECISIONS SINCE ENTERING THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, HE ALSO HAS THE REPUTA-

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TION AS A MAN WHO WILL CHANGE HIS MIND UNDER PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT OR PRESSURE.

11. THE CHANCELLOR IS APEL'S POLITICAL MENTOR. THEY

ARE BOTH FROM HAMBURG. THEY HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS. FOR A LONG TIME, APEL WAS KNOWN AS "LITTLE SCHMIDT," IN PART BECAUSE HE HAD THE SAME BLUNT SPEECH AND DIRECT MANNER AS THE CHANCELLOR. HOWEVER, SCHMIDT DID NOT ALWAYS FULLY SUPPORT APEL'S DECISIONS WHEN APEL WAS FINANCE MINISTER. THIS DID NOT BREAK THE RELATIONSHIP, BUT IT MEANS THAT APEL IS NOW TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN BEFORE HIS OWN MAN. WHERE NECESSARY, HE WILL FEEL FREE TO DIFFER WITH THE CHANCELLOR. AT THE SAME TIME, HE REMAINS CLOSE TO THE CHANCELLOR, AND THE SECRETARY'S MEETINGS WITH APEL WILL PROVIDE A LONG-RUN OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE THE CHANCELLOR'S THINKING AS MUCH AS THE MEETING WITH THE CHANCELLOR HIMSELF. STOESEL

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